



Sacred Ground: A Film and Dialogue Series on Race and Faith

**St. John the Evangelist, Hingham MA
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Glossary of Terms – Related to Race and Racial Distinctions



Can race be represented by the colors found in a crayon box?

The **biological concept of race**, whereby human populations were divided into sub-species mainly on the basis of visible physical characteristics, was dominant from the early 19th century to its decline with the defeat of the Nazis at the end of the World War II.

Race

By historical and common usage the group (sub-species in traditional scientific use) a person belongs to as a result of a mix of physical features such as skin color and hair texture, which reflect ancestry and geographical origins, as identified by others or, increasingly, as self-identified. The importance of social factors in the creation and perpetuation of racial categories has led to the concept broadening to include a common social and political heritage, making its use similar to ethnicity. Race and ethnicity are increasingly used as synonyms causing some confusion and leading to the hybrid terms race/ethnicity

Race is a powerful social category forged historically through oppression, slavery, and conquest. Most geneticists agree that racial taxonomies at the DNA level are invalid. Genetic differences within any designated racial group are often greater than differences between racial groups. Most genetic markers do not differ sufficiently by race to be useful in medical research (Duster, 2009;Cosmides, 2003). Race, then, is ***socially constructed***. It is imperative to point out here that these categories are not harmless. Rather, racial categories are defined by those with the power to organize societies and are used to construct often rigid systems of stratification.

Race refers to groups of people who have differences and similarities in biological traits deemed by society to be socially significant, meaning that people treat other people differently because of them.

U.S Census Racial Categories:

There are now five categories for data on race:

- 1) American Indian or Alaska Native.
- 2) Asian.
- 3) Black or African American.
- 4) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
- 5) White.

An individual's response to the race question is based upon self-identification. For the first time in Census 2000, individuals were presented with the option to self-identify with more than one race.

Phenotype: A person's physical appearance and constitution, including skeletal structure, height, hair texture, eye color, and skin tone.

Ancestry: A person's family lineage, which often includes tribal, regional, or national affiliations.

Racial Formation: The process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories.

Racialization: The process by which understandings of race are used to classify individuals or groups of people. The actual imposition of some racial schema on society is called *racialization*.

Historically in the United States, the process has historically involved both formal and informal inequities, including segregated schools and businesses, along with differentiated rights. The formal paths to racialization include passing laws and enacting social policies that differentiate rights and responsibilities based on race. These inequalities shape the lives of *everyone* living in a racialized society. Informal paths of racialization include social prejudice and discrimination via exclusion, violence, and the threat of violence.

Race as a Social Category:

Humans vary remarkably in wealth, exposure to environmental toxins, and access to medicine. These factors can create health disparities. Krieger (2000) describes disparities that result from racial discrimination as “biological expressions of race relations.” African Americans, for example, have higher rates of mortality than other racial groups for 8 of the top 10 causes of death in the U.S. (Race, Ethnicity, and Genetics Working Group, 2005). Although these disparities can be explained in part by social class, they are not reducible to class distinctions.

White

The term usually used to describe people with European ancestral origins who identify, or are identified, as White (sometimes called European, or in terms of racial classifications, the group known as Caucasian or Caucasoid). The word is capitalized to highlight its specific use. The term has served to distinguish these groups from those groups with skin of other colors (black, yellow, etc), and hence derives from the concept of race but is used as an indicator of ethnicity. There are problems of poverty and excess disease in subgroups of the White population, which cannot be unearthed and tackled by using the label White.

Caucasian

An Indo-European. This is Blumenbach’s 18th century term for the white race of mankind, which he derived from the people who lived in the Caucasus. This term is usually used synonymously with Caucasoid, European, or White. Alone among terms derived from traditional racial classification, Caucasian remains popular in both science and everyday language. The **Caucasian race** (also Caucasoid or Europid) is a grouping of human beings historically regarded as a biological taxon, which, depending on which of the historical **race** classifications is used, has usually included some or all of the ancient and modern populations of Europe, Western Asia, Central Asia, South Asia,

Black

A person with African ancestral origins, who self identifies, or is identified, as Black, African or Afro-Caribbean (see, African and Afro-Caribbean). The word is capitalized to signify its specific use in this way. In some circumstances the word Black signifies all non-white minority

populations, and in this use serves political purposes. While this term was widely supported in the late 20th century there are signs that such support is diminishing.

African American

The term African American refers to a person of African ancestral origins who self identifies or is identified by others as African American. While the term African American has been used at least since the 1920s, it has been the preferred term in the USA since the 1970s. As most African Americans in the USA originated from sub-Saharan Africa, the term is not applied to Africans from northern African countries such as Morocco. Most African Americans are descendants of persons brought to the Americas as slaves between the 17th and 19th century (distant ancestry). Such people differ from others who came from Africa or the Caribbean in the 20th and 21st centuries (recent ancestry), in terms of culture, language, migration history, and health. These differences are often ignored.

Negro

The term Negro means the color black in Spanish. The term Negro was widely used by White Europeans as a shortened form of the racial classification Negroid to describe people of sub-Saharan African heritage. Until the mid-20th century the term Negro was widely used for African Americans, but fell out of favor in the late 20th century. Today it is universally considered inappropriate and derogatory although it is used occasionally in some research reports. In its current use, the term is generally considered acceptable only when used by African origin people, in historical context, or in the name of organizations. The racial classification Negroid is also no longer widely accepted.

Colored

Colored was adopted in the United States by emancipated slaves as a term of racial pride after the end of the American Civil War. It was rapidly replaced from the late 1960s as a self-designation by black and later by African-American, although it is retained in the name of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Black African

The term Black African, as usually used in the UK, refers to people and their offspring with African ancestral origins who migrated via sub-Saharan Africa. The term has a geographical meaning and a more general one. Some have challenged the appropriateness of the term Black African. For example, many Somali people in England felt that their culture has more in common with Arabic cultures and were more likely to mix with such groups rather than other African descent groups. In Scotland a re-appraisal of the census 1991 and 2001 questions is underway, in response to offence taken at the use of black in relation to Africans.

African

A person with African ancestral origins who self identifies, or is identified, as African, but excluding those of other ancestry, for example, European and South Asian. This term is the

currently preferred description for more specific categories, as in African American, for example. (In terms of racial classifications, this population approximates to the group historically known as Negroid or similar terms.) In practice, Northern Africans from Algeria, Morocco, and such countries are excluded from this category. (See also Black.)

Afro-Caribbean/African Caribbean

A person of African ancestral origins whose family settled in the Caribbean before emigrating and who self identifies, or is identified, as Afro-Caribbean (in terms of racial classifications, this population approximates to the group known as Negroid or similar terms). (See also Black.)

Indigenous

This term is usually used to mean a person who belongs naturally to a place in the sense of long term family origins (see Native). This term is sometimes used to identify the majority population, for example, in the United Kingdom as an alternative to the word White. In some parts of the world, for example, Australia, the word indigenous is used specifically to refer to aboriginal populations (for example, Aborigini).

Native

Sometimes this word is used to refer to populations born, or with family origins, in a place (see indigenous). This was also a pejorative term meaning populations belonging to a non-European and imperfectly civilised or savage race, so writers need to take care.

Hispanic

A person of Latin American descent (with some degree of Spanish or Portuguese ancestral origins), who self identifies, or is identified, as Hispanic irrespective of other racial or ethnic considerations. In the United States this term, often used interchangeably with Latino, is considered an indicator of ethnic origin. The Census Bureau defines "**Hispanic** or **Latino**" as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of **race**."

Mexican-Americans

Per the 2010 US Census, the majority (52.8%) of **Mexican** Americans identified as being White. The remainder identified themselves as being of "some other **race**" (39.5%), "two or more **rac**es" (5.0%), Native American (1.4%), black (0.9%), and Asian / Pacific Islander (0.4%).

Asian

Strictly, this label applies to anyone originating from the Asian continent. In practice, this term is used in the United Kingdom to mean people with ancestry in the Indian subcontinent. In the United States, the term has broader meaning, but is mostly used to denote people of far Eastern origins, for example, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos. More specific terms should be used whenever possible.

Asian Indian

A term currently used synonymously with South Asian (see below), but with the important limitation that major South Asian populations such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi may not identify with it. This term is being used in North America to distinguish the population from Native Americans, previously known as American Indians.

Majority population

When used in race/ethnicity studies this phrase is usually used as a synonym for White or European.

People of Color

"The statutes of Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas assert that 'a person of color' is one who is descended from a Negro to the third generation, inclusive, though one ancestor in each generation may have been white. According to the law of Alabama one is 'a person of color' who has had any Negro blood in his ancestry for five generations. ... In Arkansas 'persons of color' include all who have a visible and distinct admixture of African blood.

"People of color explicitly suggests a social relationship among racial and ethnic minority groups. ... [It is] is a term most often used outside of traditional academic circles, often infused by activist frameworks, but it is slowly replacing terms such as racial and ethnic minorities. ... In the United States in particular, there is a trajectory to the term — from more derogatory terms such as negroes, to colored, to people of color. ... People of color is, however it is viewed, a political term, but it is also a term that allows for a more complex set of identity for the individual — a relational one that is in constant flux."

Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society*:

Many of above definitions on race categories taken from: *Glossary of terms relating to ethnicity and race: for reflection and debate* R Bhopal and *Negro, Black, Black African, African Caribbean, African American or what? Labelling African origin populations in the health arena in the 21st century*. Charles Agyemang, [Raj Bhopal](#), [Marc Bruijnzeels](#)